Minor event addressed at PBCDF

A control room operator at the Pine Bluff Chemical Agent Disposal Facility observed a small flame in the explosive containment room the morning of Aug. 13.

The small flame occurred during rocket processing after the fifth cut was made on a rocket drained of the nerve agent GB (sarin). The rocket debris ignited while laying in the discharge chute, the area where rockets are fed into the deactivation furnace. There was no release or migration of chemical agent outside of engineering controls, and there was no danger to the PBCDF work force, the public or the environment.

The minor event, which lasted 10 seconds, activated the automatic detection and response systems. The systems functioned as designed releasing the rocket pieces into the furnace, and the operator responded properly by initiating the chute sprays.

“As with the previous two rocket motor ignition incidents similar to this one, we will review the details surrounding the event, inspect the associated equipment, and then resume operations when we have confirmed we are able to do so safely,” said Randy Long, PBCDF site project manager. “The facility and equipment are designed to accommodate this type of occurrence. At this time, the cause of the three rocket motor ignition occurrences is under investigation.”

Rocket processing resumed the evening of Aug. 13. The remaining munitions were processed without incident. To date, PBCDF has safely processed 15,610 rockets drained of the nerve agent GB and 148,036 pounds of GB. The GB M55 rockets are currently being disposed of in the first disposal campaign, followed by the VX rockets, the VX landmines and finally the HD/HT bulk containers.